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120849Z Sep 03

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 005791

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/09/2013
TAGS: PREL PGOV TU
SUBJECT: TURKEY: LOCAL AK PARETY BOSSES CONFIDENT IN
PARTY'S PERFORMANCE, SEE BETTER THINGS TO COME

(U) Classified by Political Counselor John Kunstadter.
Reason: 1.5 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In separate early September meetings, ruling
AK Party bosses in Ankara discussed signs of improving
economic conditions, local elections, and intra-party
politics. Poloff met with Hamdi Balaban of Ankara's
left-leaning Yenimahalle district and Orhan Kaya of Altindag,
one of Ankara's poorer, working class districts. End Summary.

Local Conditions Improving -- a Little

¶2. (C) Kaya and Balaban -- both of whom own small local
businesses -- claimed there have been some signs recently of
economic recovery in their respective districts. Kaya could
not point to any concrete indication in terms of jobs, but he
said people feel confident that the economy is not heading
toward another crisis. Balaban asserted that compared to
this time last year, there are not nearly as many apartments
for rent in Yenimahalle. He took this as a sign that the
economic situation for some, at least, has improved.

¶3. (C) Nevertheless, Balaban acknowledged that very few new
businesses have emerged and that hardly any existing
businesses are hiring. As a result, Balaban explained, his
constituents come to him for assistance in finding jobs or in
financing business projects. People believe he can solve
their problems, because he is the local representative of the
AK Government. Noting that his constituents keep him busy 24
hours a day, a seemingly exhausted Balaban claimed that his
office has very few resources to help those in need and
generally steers them to other local organizations and NGOs.
On occasion, Balaban acts as a liaison with Ankara
municipality, a function made easier, he said, after current
mayor Melih Gokcek joined AK last month.

Local Elections: Nothing is Decided Yet

¶4. (C) Both Kaya and Balaban were at pains to point out that
AK has not yet chosen its candidate to run for mayor of
Ankara in local elections, currently scheduled for early next
spring. They acknowledged that Gokcek is the favorite, but
AK will not make any official announcements until the
completion of the party's general convention Oct. 12. Kaya
said AK will be conducting Ankara-wide polling research, upon
which it will base its decisions. He also cryptically noted
that "you never know, maybe a third candidate (note: not
Gokcek, and not Turgut Altinok, current AK mayor of Ankara's
conservative Kecioren district) will emerge."

¶5. (C) Although Balaban joked that AK might ship Gokcek off
to run for mayor of Istanbul, he views the current mayor as a
skilled political operator. Balaban told poloff that he went
to see Gokcek to congratulate him on joining AK and to convey
some of his constituents' concerns. Gokcek, he explained,
simply picked up the phone, made a few calls, and solved the
problems.

AK Strong, But About to Become Stronger?

¶6. (C) Kaya and Balaban expressed confidence that AK will do
well in the upcoming local elections, claiming that no
current political party poses a threat to AK -- at least
right now. They are dismissive of main opposition CHP and
the xenophobic Genc Party of Motorola deadbeat Cem Uzan,
whose financial empire is being dismantled in a series of

corruption investigations. Neither believes that the
so-called Red Apple (Kizilelma) movement -- a coalition of
far-left and far-right quasi fascists that has garnered some
recent media attention. In fact, Balaban claimed never to
have heard of the movement.

¶7. (C) Despite what they see as AK's continuing success,
Balaban candidly acknowledged that said he and his colleagues
at the local level believe there will be a cabinet shuffle
after the upcoming party convention. He said this will allow
P.M. Erdogan to install more ministers closer to him than to
F.M. Gul, who doled out most of the current portfolios while
serving as P.M. earlier this year and whom Erdogan sees as a
rival. Balaban pointed out that his party likes to talk
about having democracy in political parties but, in practice,
this can lead to a cumbersome decision-making process. "It
will be better to have a cabinet 100% behind Erdogan."
EDELMAN